

No. 2.



Labour Laws

for Women

Their Reason

... AND ...

Their Results.

CITY BRANCH PAMPHLETS.

THE purpose of the City Branch in publishing these pamphlets is to supply from inside the Party the literature which the Branches use for propaganda and other purposes. Part of the profits are to be handed over to the funds of the National Administrative Council.

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What it is, and Where it
stands.
2. Labour Laws for Women.
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Wage-Earning Children.

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LABOUR LAWS FOR WOMEN.

Their Reason and Their Results.

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"The honest earnest man must stand and work ;
The woman also ; otherwise she drops
At once below the dignity of man,
Accepting serfdom. Free men freely work :
Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease."

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

"We have seen that a deep difference in constitution expresses itself in the distinctions between male and female, whether these be physical or mental. . . . The exclusively political view of the problem has in turn been to a large extent subordinated to that of economic *laissez-faire*, from which of course it consistently appeared that all things would be settled as soon as women were sufficiently plunged into the competitive industrial struggle for their own daily bread."—GEDDES AND THOMSON.

"Since no law can be, in a final or true sense, established, but by right (all unjust laws involving the ultimate necessity of their own abrogation), the law-giving can only become a law-sustaining power in so far as it is Royal, or 'right-doing ;' in so far, that is, as it rules, not misrules, and orders, not dis-orders, the things submitted to it."—RUSKIN.

WOMEN AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.

THE Industrial Revolution has changed the character of women's work even more than that of men's. It has brought the men workers from the small isolated workshops into the large confederated industry, but it has brought the women workers out from the home into the world. Formerly the preparation of clothes and food for her own household occupied the time of almost every woman, and the various processes connected with this were carried on under her own roof. Like the virtuous woman in Proverbs, she sought wool and flax and worked willingly with her hands; she laid her hands to the spindle, and her hand held the distaff. But now the wool and flax go to huge mills to be spun, to other mills to be made up into material, and into factories to become finished garments. Laundry work and cleaning of all kinds are less and less done at home. With food it is the same. In very few parts of the country is bread now baked at home; the making of butter and cheese is becoming a centralised industry; and every year more and more of our meats and fruits and vegetables are being preserved and dried for the table in the factory instead of in the kitchen. Thus there is much less for the housewife or daughter to do in her own house than formerly; but this does not mean that she is left idle. She still has to work to live, but the work is of a different kind. She has, to a large extent, followed her former duties from the home to the mills and shops where they are now done, and instead of working at the spindle she works at the loom, instead of preserving her own fruit she fills jam-pots by the thousand for some big manufacturer. The new organisation of industry has also set many of her sex free for other kinds of work, and we find women making a living as clerks, hospital nurses, teachers, etc.*

* "It appears from the Census returns that the number of women and girls returned as occupied, out of every 1000 females above ten years of age in England and Wales was 340·5 in 1881 and 344·2 in 1891, giving an increase of nearly 4 per 1000. The number of males returned as occupied shows a decrease of 1 per 1000."—Miss CLARA COLLET, *Report on Statistics of Employment of Women and Girls*, 1894

The improved organisation of industry has increased immensely the production of wealth ; it is more questionable whether it has as yet added much to our happiness. The bulk of the wealth, and with it the power, has gone into the hands of the few ; the mass of the people have lost control over their own conditions of labour ; instead of working as their own masters and mistresses, or under masters who are personally known to them, they toil for capitalists and shareholders whom they have never seen, and never will see. Machinery bids fair to turn the men and women who work it into machines.

Nor is this the only disadvantage which the majority of women suffer. When the wife and the daughter herded the sheep, helped to shear them, spun the wool, wove the cloth, and made the clothes, they had an economic independence which protected them from a state of absolute slavery. But now that the home is no longer the domestic workshop, and the wage-earner has become the husband and the father, the wife and daughter are both subject to the generosity of the income-maker for every halfpenny which they can call their own. The progress of industry has wisely removed the loom and the distaff from the home, but the conscience and the common-sense of the nation have not yet recognised that the work which still demands the presence of great numbers of women within a narrow area of their own firesides is as valuable to the nation and as worthy of a sure and an independent pay as that done by the husband in the factory or at the bench. Until this is recognised, the position of the unpaid housewife may be infinitely worse than what is commonly called wage-slavery.

THE IDEAL AND THE ACTUAL.

The ideal would be that each woman who is not physically or mentally incapacitated should take her just share both in the work and in the recreation of the world. Her circumstances may be such that home duties are paramount. Then she should be considered by the fulfil-

ment of these to be "paying her way" as much as any outside worker, whether male or female. If her husband is earning, the money he gets for his work ought to belong to her as much as to him, for her work is as essential to the maintenance of the household as his. If she has no one to earn for her, and yet has her hands tied by household duties—if, for instance, she is a widow with small children, a wife with a sick husband, or a daughter with an infirm mother—it is utterly unjust that she should have the double burden of earning wages and attending to her home. We believe the time will come when such women as these, without incurring any of the shame attaching to the present system of out-relief, may be paid by the State in return for the care they are giving to helpless members of the community. For the women who have not home duties which absorb all their time, it is most necessary that there should be free access to outside work; for without this they are economically dependent on men, and a high standard of family life can never be maintained whilst women are driven into the marriage market from the sheer necessity of getting some one to feed and clothe them.

The actual condition of women in the labour market is very different from this ideal. We have a blind scramble of women workers, competing against and cutting down each other and men, some to gain a pocket-money wage, some to gain a starvation wage. And the conditions of work are the natural result of this disordered scramble. Women are working for fourteen or sixteen hours at a stretch at such heavy work as ironing; they are stitching all day and for good part of the night for a pay of about 1d. an hour; young mothers are ruining their babies' lives by working in poisonous glazes; shop-girls are laying up for themselves stores of future suffering and disease by standing long hours behind the counter. Men wage-earners are forced into a never-sleeping vigilance lest the woman steps into a well-organised industry, and, with her low wages and lack of industrial *esprit de corps*, drags it

down to a sweated level. Even the best-conditioned of our army of women-workers fall very far short of the ideal which, with proper organisation of our present powers and knowledge, would be quite possible.

As Socialists, we declare that this ideal must be striven for until it is attained, and we have to consider the practical steps which will lead us most quickly to it.

WOMEN'S SERVICE TO THE STATE.

But, first of all, let us be clear upon one point. The work which the State requires of its members is not all done in the factory. The State needs not only calico and cotton, but men and women, not only smoothly and rapidly working machinery, but homes. The woman who is in revolt against an immoral and degrading dependence upon some man for her pin-money, her cab-fares, or her domestic expenses, is apt to forget that service is rendered and liberty won anywhere except in the outside world. This is especially the error of the middle-class woman, and in so far as she is giving the lead to the "women's movement," she is dragging it half-a-century behind the time. She forgets the experience of the working man. She forgets that wage-earning in factories has been characterised by economists as "wage-slavery." She forgets that the husband of the woman whom she would like to see alongside of him in the factory is so often a hard taskmaster simply because he himself *has* a hard taskmaster. She takes the very old-fashioned and completely exploded view, that freedom to work for wages is the full measure of freedom which man or woman can enjoy. The view is not only antiquated but short-sighted. The riches of a State are not only goods but human flesh and blood, human character, human ideals; and if women's service can be spent best in producing human qualities, they need not be ashamed nor disappointed if men are exclusively engaged in producing economic quantities. At any rate, the idea is very false that the only service which women can render in order to entitle them to claim an inde-

pendent income is to be done in factories or in "the occupations." In order to secure freedom for women, we must not limit their services to the State. The position of the Socialist is, that all service should have its reward, and we seek to elevate in its importance rather than degrade and minimise the work which women can do, especially in improving through the home the human qualities of the nation.

But when we remember all this, there are still to be solved the problems which the woman wage-earner raises. For the widest scope in industry must be offered to women, and whether they choose the home or the factory must be a matter of their own free will.

WOMEN AS TRADE UNIONISTS.

The problems of the women wage-earners are more complicated even than those of the men. If we want women to improve conditions by their own efforts, we find them far more difficult to organize than men. The girl looks forward to marriage, and regards her work in the factory or the shop as but a temporary job; the wife, if she goes out to work, has also the care of her husband and children upon her hands; the widow is probably still more hopelessly overburdened with home cares; and even the confirmed spinster has usually some household responsibility. You cannot expect women "whose work is never done," or whose main thoughts are in other directions, to put much energy into outside organisation and agitation. Just in so far as outside work is an incident in the life of a woman and the sum of the life of a man, a man enters into voluntary combinations and makes demands upon the employer which the woman worker has no incentive to do.

The total number of women and girls returned in the last Factory Inspectors' Report (1898) is 1,508,406. This only includes those working in factories and workshops, and leaves out the vast numbers in home

industries, shops, domestic service, etc. Out of all these, only 116,016 are in Trade Unions—deducting the textile workers, only 9,546; and, however excellent the work done by this 100,000 or so may be, it is but as a drop in a bucket. Nor do their members show any regular tendency to increase; indeed, ever since the days of the “Grand Lodge of Operative Bonnet Makers,” and other high-sounding unions which in 1832 numbered their female members by tens of thousands, women unionists have been the despair of their secretaries, owing to the erratic way in which they will join by hundreds and thousands when some strike or special excitement is on, and drop all interest and support as soon as work resumes its ordinary level. The women trade unionists must always be comparatively few and inefficient, and Trade Unionism can never do for women what it has done for men. What, then, can be done? We want women to be economically free; we also want to maintain a high standard of life. We can do but one thing. We can turn to the State.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE.

The old idea that the State was nothing more than a policeman is giving way to the moral idea that it is the tangible expression of the social conscience, and that part of its duty is to maintain a high standard in the life of the individual. As regards the women workers, it can act effectively in three ways: by education—that is, by training them to do good work; by legislation to protect them when they are at work; and by being itself a model employer. The State as the great model employer is, of course, the ideal of every Socialist, but at present the branches of industry in which the community controls its own labour, either directly or through contractors, are few and far between. Technical education (in its widest sense) we may, perhaps, deal with in a later tract. At present we will confine ourselves to the question of legislative reform.

The first law limiting the hours of women in factories was passed in 1844 (in 1842 women had been excluded from working underground in mines). This was the result of many long years of agitation on the part of Lord Shaftesbury (then Lord Ashley), Richard Oastler, and other devoted men, who were enthusiastically supported by the artisans, but opposed by the manufacturers, headed by John Bright and Richard Cobden. Since then the principle has been gradually extended, and we have a vast number of regulations as to sanitation, ventilation, fencing of machinery, fire escapes, dangerous processes, hours of work, and even wages (in the Truck Acts). The principle of such legislation is now almost universally admitted. The extreme individualist who argues that the worker is free because his employer is at liberty to impose on him any conditions of toil, has practically disappeared. He still mildly protests against "grandmotherly" legislation, but the force of logic and of circumstances is too much for him. The unscrupulous employer alone is left to oppose fresh regulations and to seek to evade the minimum standard of decency and comfort which the law says he shall give to his employees.

But the opposition to labour laws relating specially to women is still active and vociferous; it is still able, or, at any rate at the time of the last Factory Act in 1895, it was able, to prevent the passing of measures which are demanded by the workers themselves and by the well informed opinion of the country.

SPECIAL LAWS FOR WOMEN.

Of the laws now at work almost all the sanitary ones apply to all adults alike, but some of the provisions relating to dangerous processes, etc., and most of those limiting the hours of work relate to women only. Men's hours are limited in certain special cases, *e.g.*, signalmen, and men are agitating for legal restriction in many other trades; but the hours of women are already limited in practically all regulated industries. From underground

work in mines and from white lead works they are excluded altogether.

Here it is that we come to sex legislation, and as this has sometimes been the cause of much abuse we have to consider it very carefully and see on what the laws are based and what their results are.

THEIR REASON.

Women are not men and men are not women.

The reason for them is simply that men and women are different and so have different needs. Take an apparently trivial point. A woman wears her hair long and has different clothes from a man; her hair and clothes catch and get in the way more easily,* and so employers are forbidden to put women to clean certain kinds of machinery in motion. Again, a woman is physically different; continuous standing, for instance, hurts her much more than it does a man,† and so the latest measure of protection has been an Act to provide seats for female shop assistants.

Under the head of physical differences, the woman's functions as a mother are by far the most important. Before and after the birth of the child whatever the mother does has immediate effect not only on her but on the child. Some kinds of hard work are not bad for her, but exhausting work and any work which involves strain, is, and certain chemical processes in which women are employed show a terrible record of baby lives sacrificed or permanently injured.‡ Here there is scope for much

* For fatal accidents due to hair and clothes see *Factory Inspectors' Report*, 1883, p. 9.

† See Dr. Service's statement of diseases due to prolonged standing of shop girls.—*Royal Commission of Labour, Report on Employment of Women*, 1893, p. 318.

‡ "The following statistics are compiled from the particulars gathered by personal investigation of the cases of lead poisoning, reported during the year ending March 31st, 1897. . . . Out of the 77 married women reported during this period, 15 have been childless and have had no miscarriage; 8 have had 21 still-born children; 35 have had 90 miscarriages, and of these 15 have had no child born; 36 have had 101 living children, of whom 61 are still alive, the great majority of the 40 who are dead have succumbed to convulsions in infancy."—*Factory Inspector's Report*, 1897. *Women Inspectors' Report*, p. 53.

more careful investigation resulting in further restrictions where these are proved to be needful. In any case, it is not good for either the mother or the baby for her to leave it and go out at once to work, and the English law fixes this limit at four weeks.* In this respect, however much it may interfere with the alleged liberty of the woman worker, it is the undoubted duty and interest of the community to protect, through her, the health of the rising generation.

There is also the economic difference between women and men which we have already pointed out, and which is due to the different part which outside employment plays in their lives. This works towards special legislation for women in two ways. First, as we have shown, it prevents women from defending their own interests as strongly as men, and so they have more immediate need of legislative help. Men in their unions, or even as individuals, are much more ready to stand out for good conditions than women, and have often got for themselves many of the advantages which women do not get except by law. The reasons sketched above, which underlie the want of organisation amongst the great mass of women, account likewise for their irresponsible and anarchistic ideas concerning their work. Outside employment is not their primary life-work, and so most of them take no trouble to train themselves for it, and no trouble to raise the conditions which they find existing.

A striking instance of what women will put up with as compared with men is afforded by the following extract from the Factory Inspectors' Report, 1898. Speaking of the substitution of men workers for women workers since the rule (June, 1898) excluding women from working in white lead, instances are given of a place where 10 men are now paid 7s. 6d. a day for doing work for which 13 women received formerly 2s. 6d. a day; and of another

* In Germany, Austria and Norway the prohibition may extend to 6 weeks. In Norway and Switzerland child-bearing women may be forbidden to work in certain unhealthy trades

large works where the manager complained that he found it necessary to employ as many men as formerly women, without better results, at double the wage. Miss Anderson, chief woman inspector, adds: "The immediately observable ill effects on the men's health of the dangerous employment, to a degree for which no payment can compensate, gives rise to a hope that this indirectly increased cost of labour will hasten development of new methods in the industry, tending to lessen or remove its dangers."

Until the law stepped in, these women were willing to work for wretched pay under conditions which no human being ought to work under, and for which the men apparently consider "no payment can compensate." Directly men were employed, their complaints gave the impetus for the discovery of an alternative mechanical process.

It is just where the law has given women a certain amount of leisure and a certain standard of comfort that they become strong and independent enough to insist upon further improvements. We have seen, that of the 116,000 women unionists, more than 106,000 belong to the very industries which are most minutely regulated, and if we want to know the workers who are most successfully ground down by their employers, we shall find them in those industries which are most entirely outside the scope of the law, as shop assistants, out-workers, and so on. Thus, special restrictions, by raising the standard of working conditions which women are so slow to raise themselves, tend to equality with man rather than to inequality.

The second way in which a woman's special economic position claims for her more special State protection than for a man, lies in the fact that her home duties are not only her own personal affair, but concern the community. The State is interested not only that she should bear healthy children, but also that she should have time to attend to their needs or those of any other members of her family, and so it is specially necessary that she

should not have too long hours or too exhausting work. Thus the objection to limiting the hours of adults has been removed more easily in the case of women than of men, and though we want regulation for all alike, it would be unreasonable to keep a good thing from the sex which needs it most because the other sex has not yet got it.

THE RESULTS OF SPECIAL LAWS.

But we must not only consider the need which calls for legal redress, we must also consider the ultimate effects of the remedies, in case they should act in some quite unwished-for way. The result of putting regulations on women's labour may be to make it less valuable to their employers, and so to keep them out of work or lower their wages.

Have they Lessened Opportunities?

As we have had laws specially restricting the hours of employment of women in operation for more than fifty years, we can look to experience on these points. During that time the number of women engaged in outside employment has immensely increased in proportion to the female population. In manufactures alone they increased from 463,600 in 1841 to 1,447,500 in 1891—that is, they were more than trebled. At the same time the female population has risen from 13,670,432 to 19,496,638, which is considerably less than half as much again. Many new occupations have been opened to women, and for this reason and because of changes in the conditions of trade, the increase is not shared by all even of the largest occupations. The two of these which have decreased most within the last ten years (taking the census figures, 1881—1891) are the two which are most absolutely unregulated—domestic service and agriculture.* In the textile trades, which are the most highly regulated,

* Domestic servants fell from 1,231 to 1,209, and agricultural labourers, and farm servants from 40 to 21 per 10,000 females of and above 10 years.

women are now decreasing in numbers, but here we find that men are decreasing still more rapidly, so that this falling-off indicates a general reduction of wage-earners.* There is evidently here no wholesale turning women out of work by special labour laws, but quite the opposite as far as the figures have any bearing upon this point. Individual cases there may have been, indeed must have been, for no change from a low form of industry to a higher form is ever wrought without individual hardships; yet even those who are looking for them seem to find it surprisingly hard to produce detailed cases. But the essential point is, that there is no trade in which the mass of the women workers has not benefitted, even if individuals have suffered.

As for the question whether or not more women would have been employed in certain trades if there had not been restrictions, it is impossible to get exact proofs one way or the other. The compositors' trade is often instanced as the one where the law has been thus detrimental; but here we find that whereas at the time the law prohibiting night-work for women in the printing trade was passed, in 1867, hardly any firms employed women compositors, now there are a great many who do so.† They are not employed anywhere on setting up morning papers, and this has sometimes been put down to their inability to work at night, but we also find that they are not employed on evening papers, which are printed in the day-time, and only on three small weekly provincial papers, and the explanation given both by employers and workers is that there is too much rush and strain in newspaper work for it to be suitable for them.

* In textile factories there were employed in 1896, 482,030 women and 306,156 men; in 1897, 475,167 women and 296,058 men.

† *Economic Journal*, June, 1899.—Women Compositors and the Factory Acts, by Miss L. B. BRADBY and Miss A. BLACK. The investigators give the approximate number of women compositors before 1867 as 22, and at the present day as 300.

Have they Lowered Wages?

Then, as to the lowering of wages, though women's wages are deplorably low now, as a whole they have risen since the time of the first Factory Acts. Again, it is impossible to prove definitely either that they would have been higher or lower without regulation, but it is a very important and significant fact that if we want to instance the most horribly low pay we have to go to the home industries, where hours are absolutely unlimited, and where we find a general average pay of 1d. or 2d. an hour,* while for the highest wages, and the wages which have steadily increased for the past fifty years, we go to the highly regulated textile factories,† and the most skilled branches of such work as bookbinding, which is also subject to regulations.

But the argument that it is the special legal restrictions on women's labour which keep down their wages, is completely settled by the fact that where women and men work under practically the same conditions which are not differently affected by the law, the women's wages are lower than the men's. The following quotation is taken from a report on "Work and Wages throughout the United States," where laws specially regulating the hours of women are few and far between: "Taking up the figures shown in the total of the immediately preceding table, we see that out of 781 instances in which men and women work at the same occupation and perform their work with the same degree of efficiency men receive greater pay in 595, or 76.2 per cent., of the instances, and women receive greater pay in 129, or 16.5 per cent., while in 57 instances, or 7.3 per cent., they receive the same pay for the same work. The men

* Countless instances may be gathered from the reports on Home Work issued by the Women's Industrial Council of London, the Glasgow Council for Women's Trades, the House of Lords Commission on Sweating, &c., &c. Out of 389 cases investigated by the Women's Industrial Council, 249 earned less than 1s. 6d. a day.

† "Women's wages in the textile trades in Dundee and Belfast have risen much more (in proportion) than men's wages in the same trades." *Report by Miss CLARA COLLET on Changes in the Employment of Women and Girls, Part I., p. 65.*

receive 32.3 per cent. greater pay than the women in the 593 instances in which they are given greater pay, while the women receive but 10.4 per cent. greater pay in the 129 instances in which they are paid higher wages." * To come nearer home, we find that even in some of the textile trades, where women do just the same work as men, and where the hours of both are identical, the average earnings of women are from 15 to 30 per cent. less than those of men.† In the cigar trade in London, where men and women alike work for $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours, and overtime is practically unknown, the union rates for women are 25 per cent. lower than men's rates for the same work, and their weekly wages, owing to their irregularity, show an even more marked difference.

In fact, the absence of limitation of hours is the very thing which the greedy or careless employer uses to screw more work out of his workers for the same pay,‡ or to let his work be so disorganised that the women waste hours doing nothing, and then make up by overtime. This kind of overdriving most effectually lowers wages, for it exhausts the workers and renders them unfit for their work, and they either do it badly and have to accept less pay, or become ill, and so lose employment.¶ The

* Eleventh Annual Report of the Commission of Labour, Washington, 1895-96, pp. 29, 30.

† See Fifth Annual Report of Labour Statistics (Board of Trade), 1897-98, *pp.* 123-124 *et seq.*

‡ A case was reported to the inspectors of a place, where girls were employed making belts, and where they were being illegally given work to take home after working in the factory both before and after dinner. The bundles given them to take home were getting larger and larger, and the girl who gave the information had to get her father and mother to help her, and they sat up sometimes till 2 a.m. to finish. At the same time the piece rates were being continually lowered. After several visits, the inspector managed to stop all giving out of work to be done after factory hours. The rate of wages was consequently raised, and the girls soon found that they were earning not only the same but actually more than they had done when they and their friends had to sit up half the night.

¶ Another actual case, which is but one of hundreds, is that of a girl of 18, who in the extremely hot summer of 1899 was kept at ironing from 8 a.m. till 10 o'clock at night (these are legal hours for laundries by the Act of 1895) and was brought home by her mother in a fainting condition and unable to return to work for a week.

real reason why shorter hours, of course within limits, do not mean, whether for men or women, that the workers do less work and get less pay, is, that proper time for rest and recreation ensures better work. The individual employer may afford to overwork his employees, and then cast them off for new ones who cost him nothing, but even for him it is really a bad bargain, and for the worker and the community we need not point out its harmfulness.

A BOGEY OPPOSITION.

It seems, then, that the bad effects of special legislation are not proved, whilst its good effects are everywhere to be met with. Indeed, all this talk about labour laws harming workers seems to originate in the brains of a few ladies who are well-known in certain political and so-called philanthropic circles, but not in the labour world. If you go to the employers and ask them if they would employ more women and pay them better if their hours were not restricted, they tell you such an idea never entered their calculations; and the thoughtful ones will often tell you that they welcome the legal limit because it enables them to withstand unscrupulous competitors, and to refuse unreasonable customers who rush in in the afternoon with work which they want done for next morning. If you go to the trade unionists with similar theories, they will laugh you to scorn, and tell you that what they are all working for is more regulation, not less.

Special inquiries sent round to the secretaries of trade unions in which there are women members, for the purpose of this tract, have elicited a large consensus of opinion * that women are by no means being driven out of work by regulation. Over and over again in the answers we find such statements as these: "No; reduction of hours finds employment for additional hands"; "Shorten-

* Out of 31 officials, men and women, 2 think the laws have tended to displace women. It should be noted, however, that both of these were in trades where women are increasing more rapidly than men; and also about which evidence was received from other officials of the Union and employers in the same towns in quite a contrary sense.

ing of Louis has made women's labour more valuable because they do their work better; they are not so tired and worn out."

The violent "anti-man" ladies see in this, as far as the men-unionists are concerned, a deep and dark conspiracy against women to keep them out of the trade. But, unfortunately for this theory, men unionists and women unionists say the same, and they are backed up by the Women's Co-operative Guild and other working women's societies. Men and women have not opposite interests in the labour world any more than in any other, and men know that it is to the interest of both sexes to raise the women's standard of work as high as possible. They do not oppose women; they oppose cheap labour, whether of men or women; and it is just in order to keep women from lowering the standard of working conditions that they welcome, as the women also do, legal regulation of those conditions.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WOMAN WORKER.

If special legislation, as we have shown, is not the origin of woman's inferiority as a wage-earner, what is? First of all, do not let us be misled by a simple comparison between her wages and those of men. The truth is, that in the great majority of cases women do not do the same work as men, even if at first sight it seems that they do. Usually they do the lighter, less skilled, and more automatic parts, and even where they are employed on similar machines the men often do extra work in lifting heavy weights (*e.g.*, the formes in a printing shop), and especially in setting the machines right when they are out of order.

Take, for an example, the lace industry at Nottingham. There is a broad distinction between the heavy lace machines—for lever, curtain, or plain net—which involve great outlay of capital, and are run by men working in double shifts, and the lighter and cheaper Plauen or Swiss machines, and automatic machines for imitation Torchon

lace, which are worked exclusively by women, with male mechanics to execute necessary repairs. In one firm, men as well as women are employed on embroidery machines; their piece-work rates are the same, but the men earn more than the women per hour. In brass bobbin winding, men are sometimes employed, but these are infirm or disabled men who are glad to do women's work and receive women's pay. These men are sometimes employed at night on the women's machines, and so also are youths.*

But the difference between the kind of work done by women and by men is by no means so wide as the difference between their wages. Everywhere the woman is underpaid in comparison with the man, and we have seen that even in some industries women get less pay than men for doing exactly the same work. When they take the place of men in any particular branch of trade, it is due sometimes to their more delicate and precise touch, but more often to the fact that some new machine has made the work less heavy, and that the employer can immediately put on women at half or less than half the rate of pay of the men.† And since we have failed to trace the cause of this underpay in the special laws protecting women, we must look elsewhere for it. We come back again to the old argument—women are badly paid and badly treated because their standard, whether of work or of comfort, is not high enough. Quite apart from any physical incapacity, their standard of work as a whole is lower than that of men. As long as marriage exists, many women will not think it worth while to train thoroughly for any other vocation, and will always be liable to leave their work just as they are getting properly to understand

* Special permission is given by section 44 of the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 to employ boys over 16 in lace factories at night, but the Factory Bill now before Parliament repeals this provision.

† For the influx of cheap women's labour into the boot and shoe and tailoring industries, owing to new machinery and greater subdivision of labour, see CHARLES BOOTH'S *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Vol. IV.

it. It is not the limitation of the hours during which a woman can work which inconveniences her employer, and makes her work less valuable to him; it is the limitation of the number of years during which she is likely to work after he has given time and trouble to teaching her. It will always be difficult to overcome this great drawback; but the standard of comfort can be better dealt with. Very few employers consciously offer a woman low wages because she will submit quietly to an injustice; but unconsciously they all do this. It is customary for a woman to have less pay, and it is the custom because she has acquiesced in it. She has allowed the employer to believe that she has no one but herself to support, and that she can live on bread and butter and tea, whilst a man must eat beefsteaks and has a family to support. Those of her sex who only need to work for a pocket-money wage intensify the evil, and until we get, on the part of women workers, an insistent demand for a "living wage" and decent conditions of work, we shall remain as far from the ideal as ever.

These differences between the whole standard of men's and women's work and men's and women's wages could not possibly be swept away by working the women longer hours or working them at night. To regulate the men also may be desirable, but it will not affect the women, while to do away with the regulations for women would be to remove the chief barriers they have against wholesale oppression. The primary evils of women's work, as we have tried to point out, lie in its casual and unsettled nature, and regulation tends to steady it, and so to make it more effective. True freedom for a woman is not freedom to earn *any* wage under *any* conditions. It is freedom to live a life that is worth living, and to develop her powers to the full; and this she cannot have while she is practically a slave to the caprice of her employer and the pressure of unrestricted competition. Every law which limits the power of the employer to ask of her more than it is fair for her to give,

is a step towards her full industrial liberty and economic independence. Such a law is effective not only in regulating the conditions it refers to, but also in teaching the woman self-respect and self-reliance as a worker. Though the limiting of hours or the providing of sitting accommodation may not seem directly to raise her wages, it does so indirectly because a rise in the standard of employment at one point really raises it all round; and it is not an accident but direct cause and effect that such regulation and good wages go together, and *vice versa*.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES.

We have by no means reached the limit of good labour laws either for women or men; and the further extension of them is one of the many practical points which Socialists are forcing to the front. This is a matter in which the help of the women members of the Independent Labour Party should be specially valuable, for so many of them have personal knowledge of the conditions which exist and the evils which need remedy. We cannot even enter upon a discussion of future possibilities here, except to point out that it is the trades outside the range of regulation, such as the home industries, and others very partially regulated, such as laundries, which specially need attention.

There can be no *a priori* reasoning in this matter. Each case must be investigated and judged upon its own merits and with regard to its special circumstances. Though it is very desirable to extend the limitation of hours to trades which now escape, the same form of limitation does not suit all industries. For instance, some of the most flagrant cases of long hours may be found among the fish-curers. When there is a big catch of fish, the women work sometimes for two or three days on end, eating their meals at the sheds, and with only a few hours snatched for sleep. Yet even those who most strenuously advocate restriction of women's hours do not propose to introduce

a 10½ hours' day in the gutting and curing sheds. You cannot order the ways of the fish in the sea as you can regulate yards of cotton cloth on the loom, and allowance must be made for occasional pressure of work when the nets bring in a great haul. But sanitary conditions can be much improved in these curing sheds, and one of the best features of the generally retrograde Government Factory Bill of this Session (1900) is that it definitely gives control over these to the Factory Inspectors.

Our aim in whatever we do must be to adjust the standard of regulation to present possibilities, to set it higher and higher as we progress, but not to overreach ourselves and make laws which are so far in advance of public opinion, or so much wider in scope than the provisions we make for enforcing them, that they remain dead letters.

It is because we believe that it is possible to get much nearer to the ideal of women's work which we have set before us, and because we find that the special laws for women have greatly improved industrial conditions hitherto, that we advocate their further extension in the future. At the same time we welcome the fact that the State is beginning more and more to take the male worker also under its protection, for we believe that only in the co-operation of men and women, working together as equal though dissimilar parts of the community, can the ideal brotherhood be realised.

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